

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 06087 01 OF 02 020833Z

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W

-----043112 020839Z /20

O 020740Z AUG 78

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3954

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CANBERRA 6087

STADIS////////////////////////////////

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, VN, AS

SUBJECT: LETTER FROM FONMIN PEACOCK TO ASST SEC HOLBROOKE
RE PHAN HIEN'S VISIT TO AUSTRALIA

1. EMBOFF OBTAINED COPY OF LETTER FOREIGN MINISTER ANDREW PEACOCK HAS WRITTEN TO ASST. SEC. HOLBROOKE FOLLOWING VIETNAMESE VICE FOREIGN MINISTER PHAN HIEN'S RECENT VISIT TO AUSTRALIA. TELEGRAPHIC COPY OF TEXT SENT TO AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON YESTERDAY, SIGNED ORIGINAL FOLLOWING IN AUSTRALIAN DIPLOMATIC POUCH.

2. THE AUSTRALIANS ARE VERY INTERESTED IN THE US-ASEAN BILATERALS, AND IN PARTICULAR, OUR IMPRESSIONS CONCERNING ASEAN VIEWS ON VIETNAM WHICH RESULT FROM THOSE TALKS. WE SUSPECT THAT PEACOCK HOPES FOR WORD FROM ASST. SEC. HOLBROOKE SOON AFTER THE ASEAN BILATERALS ABOUT THE US PERCEPTION OF THE EVOLUTION OF TIS RELATIONSHIP WITH BOTH AECAN AND VIETNAM IN THE WAKE OF CURRENT EVENTS.

3. TEXT FOLLOWS:

"DEAR DICK,

NOW THAT PHAN HIEN IS HOME, I FELT I SHOULD WRITE
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TO YOU TO GIVE YOU OUR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF WHAT HE HAD TO SAY, BEARING IN MIND PARTICULARLY YOUR LETTER OF 26 APRIL AND OUR DISCUSSION IN HONIARA ON 7 JULY.

I INSTRUCTED MY DEPARTMENT TO BRIEF YOUR EMBASSY FULLY ON PHAN HIEN'S TALKS HERE AND I UNDERSTAND THAT WAS DONE. I WILL NOT, THEREFORE, GO OVER THE DETAILS

OF THE DISCUSSIONS, EXCEPT AS REGARDS THOSE MATTERS YOU SUGGESTED I MIGHT RAISE WITH PHAN HIEN. I TOLD PHAN HIEN THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD NOW FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS THAN WOULD HAVE BEEN THE CASE LAST YEAR. I ALSO TOLD HIM THAT THE UNITED STATES WAS LETTING IT BE KNOWN TO THE PRESS THAT ITS INTELLIGENCE DID NOT CONFIRM CHINESE REPORTS OF A SOVIET MILITARY BASE AT CAM RANH BAY AND THAT THE UNITED STATES WANTED VIETNAM TO KNOW THAT. I EMPHASISED THAT NORMALISATION WOULD COME MORE EASILY IF CRITICAL STATEMENTS BY VIETNAM, FOR EXAMPLE ABOUT REFUGEES, COULD BE LESSENERED. FINALLY, I TOLD HIM THAT YOU WERE DISAPPOINTED THAT YOU COULD NOT SEE THACH IN EUROPE BUT WERE HOPING TO MEET HIM DURING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN NEW YORK. FOR HIS PART, PHAN HIEN COMMENTED THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT MR. CARTER HAD PROBLEMS: VIETNAM HE SAID UNDERSTOOD THE DIFFICULTIES. HE CLAIMED THAT A REDUCTION IN CRITICAL STATEMENTS WOULD BE POSSIBLE WHEN VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES HAD NORMAL RELATIONS. REGARDING A MEETING IN NEW YORK, HE SAID THAT A MIS-UNDERSTANDING ON THE PART OF THE UNITED STATES HAD PREVENTED A MEETING DURING THE LAST GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUT THAT VIETNAM WAS READY IF YOU WANTED TO TALK NEXT TIME.

IT SEEMS CLEAR FROM PHAN HIEN'S TOUR AND FROM THACH'S CONCURRENT VISIT TO WESTERN EUROPE, WHERE HE
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HAS BEEN SAYING MUCH THE SAME THINGS, THAT VIETNAM IS ENGAGED IN A MAJOR DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE, DESIGNED TO IMPROVE AND DEVELOP RELATIONS WITH ASEAN AND THE WEST. ONE CANNOT BE COMPLETELY CONFIDENT ABOUT ONE'S ASSESSMENT OF ITS MOTIVATION AT THIS STAGE. AN IMPORTANT FACTOR SEEMS TO BE A DESIRE TO PRESERVE ITS INDEPENDENCE BY FINDING A NEW COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE SOVIET UNION, FOLLOWING THE RECENT SERIOUS DETERIORATION IN ITS RELATIONS WITH CHINA. THE WEST IS ALSO A POTENTIAL LARGE SOURCE OF AID AND INVESTMENT.

THE EVIDENT PLEASURE OF THE SOVIET UNION AT VIETNAM'S INITIATIVE, OF COURSE, MAY MAKE ITS ACHIEVEMENT MORE DIFFICULT AND CHINESE CLAIMS THAT IT IS ALL A SOVIET PLOY MORE PLAUSIBLE. THE SOVIET ROLE AND INTERESTS WILL BEAR CAREFUL WATCHING. NEVERTHELESS, WE BELIEVE THAT VIETNAM'S PROTESTATIONS OF ATTACHMENT TO THEIR INDEPENDENCE ARE TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. I HAVE RECEIVED FROM PHILIP ALSTON YOUR OWN ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION IN INDO-CHINA, FOR WHICH I AM MOST GRATEFUL. AT FIRST GLANCE, IT SEEMS WE HAVE AN IDENTITY OF VIEWS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 CANBERRA 6087
STADIS/////////////////////////////////
EXDIS

WE BELIEVE THAT VIETNAM'S CAPACITY TO DEFEND ITS
INDEPENDENCE, PARTICULARLY FROM THE SOVIET EMBRACE, WILL
BE GREATLY ENHANCED IF THEY RECEIVE SOME ENCOURAGEMENT
FOLLOWING THEIR CURRENT INITIATIVES. I DO NOT UNDERRATE
THE DIFFICULTIES, FOR YOURSELVES AS WELL AS OTHERS.

FOR OUR OWN PART, WE DO NOT HAVE THE RESOURCES TO
CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO VIETNAM'S ECONOMIC NEEDS. IN
PARTICULAR, WE FIND THEIR CURRENT NEED FOR SOFT LOANS
TO FINANCE TRADE ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT. THERE ARE ALSO
POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS, BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL.
NEVERTHELESS, WE ARE TRYING SLOWLY TO ADD SUBSTANCE TO
OUR RELATIONS. WE HAVE A SMALL AID PROGRAM. THE NUMBER
OF VIETNAMESE OFFICIAL VISITORACCOMING TO AUSTRALIA IS
INCREASING AND WE WILL SOON BE EXAMINING A RESPONSE TO
VIETNAMESE OVERTURES ON THE CULTURAL RELATIONS FRONT.

IN ADDITION, WE ARE LIKING FOR MATTERS OF GENERAL
CONCERN ON WHICH WE CAN HAVE EXCHANGES OF VIEWS, THEREBY
ADDING TO THEIR STORE OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE WEST, WHILE
LEARNING SOMETHING OURSELVES ABOUT VIETNAMESE ATTITUDES.
AS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS, WE ARE HOPING TO DISCUSS WITH
THE VIETNAMESE IN HANOI NEXT MONTH THE DISARMAMENT
ITEMS ON THE NEXT GENERAL ASSEMBLY AGENDA. NOT A MAJOR
INITIATIVE IN ITSELF, IT WILL, IF IT HAPPENS, BE THE
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FIRST TIME WE HAVE HAD DISCUSSIONS OF THIS SORT WITH THEM.

I AM DELIGHTED THAT YOUR CONSULTATIONS WITH ASEAN MINISTERS ARE TAKING PLACE IN WASHINGTON. THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE SITUATION WILL BE INTERESTING.

I PARTICULARLY VALUE THE CLOSE CONSULTATION WE HAVE HAD ON THIS MATTER AND WHICH MY DEPARTMENT HAS HAD WITH YOUR PEOPLE, BOTH HERE AND IN WASHINGTON. I LOOK FORWARD TO LEARNING HOW YOU DECIDE TO RESPOND TO THE VIETNAMESE. TO THE EXTENT THAT YOU WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE TO TAKE A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH AND THAT THE VALUE OF SOME STEPS MAY DEPEND ON HOW THEY ARE PERCEIVED, I REMAIN READY TO ASSIST THE PROCESS OF HELPING THE VIETNAMESE SEE THINGS AS THEY SHOULD BE SEEN. WITH WARM PERSONAL REAGRDS, YOURS SINCERELY, ANDREW PEACOCK."
ALSTON

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